

# FEEDING THE DRAGON

## An Eschatological Motif in Medieval Europe

Edited by Claudia Di Sciacca and Andrea Meregalli









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**edited by Claudia Di Sciacca and Andrea Meregalli**

di/segni

Dipartimento di Lingue, Letterature, Culture e Mediazioni  
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FROM GULPING DRAGON TO HARMLESS MOUSE.  
CHRIST'S DECEPTION AND ENTRAPMENT OF SATAN  
IN NIÐRSTIGNINGAR SAGA

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O. INTRODUCTION

Along with the *Infancy Gospel of the Pseudo-Matthew*, the *Gospel of Nicodemus* or *Evangelium Nicodemi*, which forcefully depicts extra-canonical scenes relating to Christ's Passion, entombment, and Harrowing of Hell, was undoubtedly one of the most widely circulated and influential narratives amongst the New Testament Apocrypha. Such fortune is testified today by the survival of some 436 Latin codices preserving both primitive and progressively embellished texts that can be grouped into four main redactions and a great number of sub-redactions.<sup>1</sup>

The earliest evidence of the dissemination and knowledge of the *Evangelium Nicodemi* in medieval Scandinavia is represented by an Old Norse-Icelandic adaptation of the Latin text known already from medieval sources as *Niðrstigningar saga*, "The Story of the Descent".<sup>2</sup> As promptly clarified by its title, the Old Norse-Icelandic text includes only the second section of the

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1 Latin A, Latin B, Latin C, and Latin T. The full census of the Latin tradition is available in Izydorczyk 1993. On the genesis and development of the Latin text, see especially Izydorczyk 1997b and 1997c; and Izydorczyk and Dubois 1997. On the nomenclature of the Latin texts, see especially Izydorczyk 1997c and Bullitta 2017a, 3-20. I have recently suggested the ninth-century cathedral schools of northern France as a possible place of production of the primitive Latin text. See the discussion in Bullitta 2017a, 9-12.

2 A first comprehensive survey on the reception of the *Gospel of Nicodemus* in medieval Scandinavia can be found in Wolf [1993] 1997. A second, independent Old Norse translation of the *Evangelium Nicodemi*, ultimately derived from Latin A and entitled *Af fangelsi Joseps*, is first

apocryphon, the *Descensus Christi ad inferos*, while the *Acta Pilati* are entirely omitted. In my recent study and edition of the vernacular text, I have suggested how the presence in *Niðrstigningar saga* of variant readings typical of a twelfth-century Latin version produced in northern France known as Latin T<sup>3</sup> indicates that the Icelandic compiler employed this version rather than Latin A, the so-called ‘Majority Text’ of the Latin tradition, the more widely disseminated version of the apocryphon in western Europe (Bullitta 2017a, 54-69; cf. Bullitta 2014a, 134-37).<sup>4</sup> Moreover, a closer analysis of the textual interpolations drawn from foreign sources revealed the compiler’s acquaintance with biblical glosses and commentaries produced during the second half of the twelfth century by some of the greatest exegetes of the Paris school of theology, Peter Lombard (1100-1160) and Peter Comestor (1100-1178) in particular. The work of translating and revising the Latin *Evangelium Nicodemi* might reasonably have been undertaken at the Skálholt cathedral school (southern Iceland) between the years 1199 and 1211 – roughly a century after the date suggested by Magnús Már Lárusson (cf. Bullitta 2014a, 147-48, and 2017a, 96). This essay focuses on two of the four interpolations in *Niðrstigningar saga* that provide two highly divergent descriptions of Satan, both before and after his encounter with Christ in hell, and on the editorial and theological nature of such interventions (cf. Bullitta 2014a, 137-47, and 2017a, 70-85).

## I. SEVEN-HEADED SATAN

Except for the epithets that emphasize the role of Satan as the undisputed sovereign of hell – *princeps et dux mortis* (Kim 1973, 38; “Prince and ruler of Death”) – or his low position in the cosmogonical order as a consequence of his disastrous fall – *sputio iustorum, derisio angelorum Dei* (Kim 1973, 38; “spittle of the just, scorn of the angels of God”) – the standard text of the *Evangelium Nicodemi* omits any detailed physical description of Satan. Nevertheless, when finally Satan is overcome by Christ and Inferus addresses him as *princeps perditionis et dux exterminationis Beelzebub* (Kim 1973, 43; “Prince of perdition and Ruler of destruction Beelzebub”), Latin T adds the adjective *tricabite* (Bullitta and Izydorczyk 2017, 611; “three-headed”), thus evoking the figure of Cerberus, the mythological hound guarding the underworld in Greek and Roman traditions. The reading “three-headed devil” can be traced back to a Good Friday sermon by Eusebius of Alexandria<sup>5</sup> and might have been known

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edited and discussed in Bullitta 2016. The text is fragmentary and includes exclusively Joseph of Arimathea’s legendary imprisonment and miraculous release on the part of Christ.

3 Latin T is known as ‘The Troyes Redaction’ after the call number of its most ancient witness, Troyes, Médiathèque du Grand Troyes, 1636 (s. xii<sup>o</sup>, Clairvaux). Its text was first made available in a recent critical edition. Cf. Bullitta and Izydorczyk 2017.

4 A fifteenth-century Old Swedish translation compiled at Vadstena Abbey is a close rendition of a text of a T-type. Cf. Bullitta 2014b and 2017b.

5 Eusebius of Alexandria, *Sermones* 1-12, 403-04.

to the twelfth-century author of Latin T through Augustine's *De civitate Dei*.<sup>6</sup> The Icelandic compiler remains faithful to his source and recalls the image of a *Satan með III höfðom* "Satan with three heads" juxtaposing it to the adjective which describes *Satan með VII höfðom* "Satan with seven heads", an interpolation derived from the seven-headed dragon of Rev. 12:3 that is absent in Latin A and in Latin T and peculiar only to the Old Norse-Icelandic translation:

<i>Niðrstigningar saga</i>	Rev. 12:3
Satan iotunn helvitis höfðingi er stundom er með VII höfðom enn stundom með III enn stundom i drekalike þess er omorlegr er oc ogorlegr oc illilegr a allar lunder (Bullitta 2017a, 137). <sup>7</sup>	et visum est aliud signum in caelo et ecce draco magnus rufus habens capita septem et cornua decem et in capitibus suis septem diademata (Weber et al. [1969] 2007). <sup>8</sup>

It appears that the Icelandic compiler made a typological connection between the historical Harrowing of Hell, which took place between Good Friday and Easter Sunday, and Christ's ultimate dealing with Satan during his Second Coming as reported in Revelation. This shifting of the narrative timeline from the first century AD to the Last Days renders the Icelandic translation more topical and confers on it a more liturgical character: the Christian audience is compelled to consider the future prophetic implications of the story, hence becoming all the more engrossed in the narrative action of the pseudo-gospel.

## 2. THE CAPTURE OF SATAN ON THE CROSS

The following interpolated section can undoubtedly be considered one of the high points of the narrative, as it describes the rapid succession of events after Satan has been cast out of hell. First, taking the shape of a gigantic dragon, Satan threatens the world, and at the news of Christ's crucifixion, he travels to Jerusalem, convinced that he is capable of slaying Christ. Just as he is about to swallow the soul of Christ, he belatedly and bitterly realizes that he has instead been entrapped on the cross, much like a fish caught on a fishhook, a mouse in a mousetrap, or a fox in a snare.

<sup>6</sup> Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 4. For a discussion on the figure of Cerberus in the Middle Ages, see Savage 1949-52.

<sup>7</sup> "The giant Satan, the Prince of Hell, who sometimes has seven heads and sometimes three, and sometimes is in the shape of a dragon, which is horrible, terrible, and awful in all respects" (Bullitta 2017a, 160).

<sup>8</sup> "And there was seen another sign in Heaven: and behold a great dragon, having seven heads, and ten horns, and on his head seven diadems." Here and in the following, all English translations of the Vulgate are taken from the Douay-Rheims Bible, available at <http://drbo.org>, accessed 23 January 2023.

Þa bra hann ser i drecalike oc gørdiz þa sva mikill at hann þottesc liggia mundo umb heimenn allan utan. Hann sa þau tíþende (er gørdoz) at Iorsolom at Iesus Christus var þa i andlati oc for (hann) þangat þegar oc ætlaþi at slita ondina þegar fra honom. Enn er hann com þar oc hugþez gløpa mundo hann oc hafa meþ ser þa beit øngullinn goddomens hann enn crossmarkit fell a hann ovann oc varþ hann þa sva veiddr se(m) fiscr a øngle eþa mus under treketti eþa sem melracki i gilldro eptir þvi sem fyrer var spat. Þa for til Dominus Noster oc bat hann (Bullitta 2017a, 137).<sup>9</sup>

Scholars have interpreted this passage in various ways. Gabriel Turville-Petre, followed by Magnús Már Lárusson, posits that it is derived from the famous passage in Job 41, where Yahweh warns Job of the absurdity of any attempt to catch the Leviathan (the mythological monster of chaos) and ironically asks his interlocutor whether he is able to simply catch the beast and pierce it with a fishhook (cf. Turville-Petre 1953, 126-28; Magnús Már Lárusson, 1955, 161):

an extrahere poteris Leviathan hamo et fune ligabis linguam eius numquid pones circulum in naribus eius et armilla perforabis maxillam eius numquid multiplicabit ad te preces aut loquetur tibi mollia numquid feriet tecum pactum et accipies eum servum sempiternum numquid includes ei quasi avi aut ligabis illum ancillis tuis concident eum amici dividunt illum negotiatores numquid implebis sagenas pelle eius et gurgustium piscium capite illius pone super eum manum tuam memento belli nec ultra addas loqui ecce spes eius frustabitur eum et videntibus cunctis praecipitabitur non quasi crudelis suscitabo eum quis enim resistere potest vultui meo quis ante dedit mihi ut reddam ei omnia quae sub caelo sunt mea sunt (Weber et al. [1969] 2007).<sup>10</sup>

9 “Then he transformed himself into the shape of a dragon and grew to such a stature that it seemed he could lie around the whole world. He saw those events that occurred in Jerusalem, that Jesus Christ was breathing His last, and immediately travelled there and intended to tear away His soul at once from Him. But when he came there and thought he could swallow Him and carry Him away, the hook of divinity bit him, and the sign of the cross fell down on him, and he was caught like a fish on a fishhook, a mouse in a mousetrap or an arctic fox in a snare, according to what was previously prophesied. Then Our Lord went to him and bound him.” (Bullitta 2017a, 160).

10 “Canst thou draw out the Leviathan with a hook, or canst thou tie his tongue with a cord? Canst thou put a ring in his nose, or bore through his jaw with a buckle? Will he make many supplications to thee, or speak soft words to thee? Will he make a covenant to thee, and wilt thou take him to be a servant forever? Shalt thou play with him as with a bird, or tie him up for thy handmaids? Shall friends cut him in pieces, shall merchants divide him? Wilt thou fill nets with his skin, and the cabins of fishes with his head? Lay thy hand upon him: remember the battle, and speak no more. Behold this hope shall fall him, and in the sight of all he shall be

Gary Aho considered the interpolation as native narrative material derived from the mythological fishing for the Miðgarðsormr, the World Serpent of Norse mythology, related most extensively in the poem *Hymiskviða* of the *Poetic Edda*, and subsequently treated by Snorri Sturluson (1179-1241) in the *Prose Edda*, in which Þórr, on his fishing expedition, attempts to catch the Miðgarðsormr but eventually fails (Aho 1969).<sup>11</sup> James Marchand subsequently discarded this theory and drew attention to Gregory the Great's *Homilia XXV in Evangelia* on the Resurrection of Christ, in which Job 41 is quoted and commented upon, a homily that made its way into the *Icelandic Homily Book*, Stockholm, Kungliga biblioteket, Holm perg 15 4to (s. xiii<sup>in</sup>, Iceland), in which the name *Leviathan* is glossed above the line with *Miðgarðsormr* (Marchand 1975, 329):

oc fté hAN þá yver en forna fiánda ef hAN lét ofriþar men beriasc í gegn fé. þat fýnde dróttén þa ef hAN mælte við en sæla iób. MON eige þu draga leviathan `miþgarþar ormr´ a ɔngle eþa bora kiþr hans meþ báuge. Sia gléypande hvalr merker gróþgan anfota þAN ef fvelga vill ait mankyn idaþa. Agn es lagt a ɔngol en hvas broddr léynesc. þena orm tók almáttegr goþ a ɔngle. þa es hAN fende son fín til dáuþa sýnelegan at líkam en ofýnelegan at goþdóme. Diaboluf fa agn lícamf hanf þat es hAN beit oc vilde fyrfara. en goþdomf broddr stangaþe hAN fvaþem ɔngol. A ɔngle varþ hAN teken. þuiat hAN beidesc at griþa lícams agn þat ef hAN sa. en vas goþdómf brodr fa ef léyindr vaf fæþe hAN. A ongle varþ hAN teken. þuiat hAN fek scaþa afþui ef hAN béit. oc glataþe hAN þeim es hAN hafþe áþr velde yver. þuiat `hAN´ tréytesf at griþa þAN es hAN hafþe etke velde igegn (de Leeuw van Weenen 1993, fol. 35<sup>v</sup>).<sup>12</sup>

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cast down. I will not stir him up, like one that is cruel: for who can resist my countenance? Who hath given me before that I should repay him? All things that are under Heaven are mine." Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own.

11 The myth is addressed in Meulengracht Sørensen 1986. Snorri's treatment of the poem is discussed in Wolf 1977.

12 "And then He [Christ] overcame the Old Enemy, who had let hostile people go against Him. This was shown by the Lord when He spoke to the blessed Job: *You cannot drag out the Leviathan*, i.e. the Miðgarðsormr, *on a fishhook, or pierce its jaw with a ring* [Job 41:1-3 (40:20-21)]. This devouring whale symbolizes the greedy enemy that wants to swallow mankind into Death. The bait is lain on the fishhook and its sharp point remains hidden. That serpent was taken on a fishhook by the Almighty Lord when He sent His Son to death with a visible body but an invisible divinity. The Devil saw the bait of his body, which he bit and wanted to destroy, but the divinity picked him like a fishhook. He was taken on a fishhook because he was impelled to seize the bait of the body, which he could see, but the sharp point of the divinity, which was hidden, injured him. He was taken on the fishhook because he was hurt by what he had bitten and he lost what previously was under his power because he trusted himself in seizing the One upon whom he had no power." The text corresponds to Gregory the Great, *Homiliae in Evangelia*, col. 1194.

It should nevertheless be noted that the first line of the interpolation makes no explicit reference to the Leviathan itself; instead it describes the terrifying transformation of Satan into a great dragon after his expulsion from hell. This description seems to be typologically and formally more suitable to the literary context of Revelation, Satan's rejection from hell being reminiscent of his other epic expulsion, his fall from Paradise.

As I have recently suggested, the second section concerning the defeat of Satan is not derived from the Bible itself, and the homily of Gregory the Great in the *Icelandic Homily Book*, albeit thematically and theologically suitable, cannot be considered the ultimate source of this passage, since it lacks the other two images: those of a mousetrap and a snare (cf. Bullitta 2017a, 54-69; see also Bullitta 2014a, 134-37). The analogy between the cross and a fishhook, subsequently adopted by Gregory the Great at the end of the sixth century, was first employed in the fourth century by Gregory of Nyssa (c. 372-395) in one of his sermons to illustrate the meaning and consequence of the death of Christ.<sup>13</sup> Gregory of Nyssa suggested that the death of Christ was a necessary ransom paid to the Devil by God himself, who sacrificed his only Son to deliver humanity from original sin. Satan accepted God's bargain, but he was eventually defeated as he failed to recognize the duality of Christ's nature: both human and divine. Gregory tells that when the Devil, hungry for death and blinded by his greed, saw Christ in his earthly body on the cross, he rushed to gulp down Christ's body but was instead entrapped on the cross like a "ravenous fish" on a "fishhook."<sup>14</sup> This view, which was later labelled the 'Ransom theory of Atonement', became the most widely disseminated theory of Redemption throughout Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages.<sup>15</sup> In the fifth century, Augustine drew extensively on this theory and further developed it, suggesting that God consciously decided not to defeat the Devil by exercising his absolute power over him but instead preferred to conquer him through justice in order to provide a good example to humanity.<sup>16</sup> It is implicit then that Christ's victory over the Devil was the result of the Devil's own abuse of power since he tried to exercise over Christ the power that he possessed over earthly sinners only.

<sup>13</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Oratio Catechetica magna*, col. 65.

<sup>14</sup> "For since, as has been said before, it was not in the nature of the opposing power to come in contact with the undiluted presence of God and to undergo His enclouded manifestation, therefore, in order to secure that the ransom in our behalf might be easily accepted by him who required it, the Deity was hidden under the veil of our nature, so that, as with ravenous fish, the hook of the Deity might be gulped down along with the bait of flesh, and thus life being introduced into the house of death and light shining in darkness that which is diametrically opposed to light and life must vanish; for it is not in the nature of darkness to remain when light is present, or of death to exist when life is active." (Schaff and Wallace 1982, 927-73). On Gregory of Nyssa's employment of the fishhook metaphor, see especially Satran 2004, 357-64.

<sup>15</sup> For a historical overview of the different theories of atonement, see Rashdall 1919; Aulén [1930] 1969.

<sup>16</sup> The Devil's rights of possession are exposed in Augustine's *De Trinitate*, book 13, chapter 12, col. 1026, in a section entitled *Propter Adae peccatum iusto Dei iudicio in potestatem diaboli est genus humanum*.



Accordingly, Gregory's fishhook metaphor seems to have at least partially inspired Augustine to adopt the image of a so-called *muscipula* ('mousetrap') for the capturing of Satan on the cross, a gloomy image that was normally reserved for the temptations of Satan. While it has been recently advanced that in his writings, Augustine might have intended *muscipula* simply as a synonym to the more common *laqueus* ('snare/trap for animals and birds') and not as a specific 'mousetrap' (see Scott-Macnab 2014), it is evident that throughout the Middle Ages and modern times, the noun *muscipula* has been consistently interpreted with its specific meaning of 'trap for mice'.<sup>17</sup>

Of particular interest to this discussion is *Sermo* 265D entitled *De Quadragesima Ascensione Domini*, a sermon delivered against the Manicheans and their heresies, which contemplated Christ as a pure emanation of the deity and neglected his human substance. A section of the text commenting upon 1 Cor. 15:54 that reads "Death is swallowed up in victory" and entitled *Crux Christi muscipula fuit diabolo*, "The cross of Christ became a mousetrap for the devil", displays important verbal and thematic affinities to the interpolated text of *Níðrstigningar saga*:

<i>Níðrstigningar saga</i>	<i>De Quadragesima Ascensione Domini</i>
<p>Þa bra hann ser i drecalike oc gørdiz þa sva mikill at hann þottesc liggia mundo umb heimenn allan utan. Hann sa þau tiþende (er gørdoz) at Iorsolom at Iesus Christus var þa i andlati oc for (hann) þangat þegar oc ætlaþi at slita ondina þegar fra honom. Enn er hann com þar oc hugbez gløpa mundo hann oc hafa meþ ser þa beit øngullinn goddomens hann enn crossmarkit fell a hann ovann oc varþ hann þa sva veiddr se(m) fiscr a øngle eþa mus under treketti eþa sem melracki i gilldro eptir þvi sem fyrer var spat. Þa for til Dominus Noster oc bat hann (Bullitta 2017a, 137).<sup>18</sup></p>	<p>quid ergo miraris? certe uita est christus: quare mortua est uita? nec anima mortua est, nec uerbum mortuum est: caro mortua est, ut in ea mors moreretur. mortem passus, mortem occidit: ad leonem escam in laqueo posuit. piscis si nihil uellet deuorare, in hamo non caperetur. mortis auidus diabolus fuit, mortis auarus diabolus fuit. crux christi muscipula fuit: mors christi, immo caro mortalis christi tamquam esca in muscipula fuit. uenit, hausit et captus est. ecce resurrexit christus: mors ubi est? iam in illius carne dicitur, quod in nostra in fine dicitur: absorta est mors in uictoriam. caro erat, sed corruptio non erat. manente natura qualitas immutatur: ipsa substantia, sed nullus ibi iam defectus, nulla tarditas, nulla corruptio, nulla indigentia, nihil mortale, nihil quale solemus nosse terrenum. tangebatur, tractabatur, palpabatur, sed non occidebatur (Augustine, <i>Sermo</i> 265D, 662).<sup>19</sup></p>

17 For a survey of the mousetrap metaphor in the writings of Augustine, see Berchtold 1992, 21-52.

18 "Then he transformed himself into the shape of a dragon and grew to such a stature that it seemed he could lie around the whole world. He saw those events that occurred in Jerusalem, that Jesus Christ was breathing His last, and immediately travelled there and intended to tear away His soul at once from Him. But when he came there and thought he could swallow Him and carry Him away, the hook of divinity bit him, and the sign of the cross fell down on him, and he was caught like a fish on a fishhook, a mouse in a mousetrap, or an arctic fox in a snare, according to what was previously prophesied. Then Our Lord went to him and bound him."

19 "The cross of Christ was a mousetrap for the Devil. So why be surprised? Surely, Christ is life: so why did life die? The soul did not die, the Word did not die, but the flesh died, so that Death would die in it. Having suffered Death, He slew Death; He put the bait for the lion in the snare. If the fish did not want to devour anything, he would not be caught on the fishhook.

In the Old Norse-Icelandic text, these narrative elements are presented in a different order due to the necessary reformulation and adaptation of the sermon to the plot of the pseudo-gospel. Nevertheless, the Icelandic compiler seems to be attentive by partly translating and partly accommodating all the above-mentioned similes. Accordingly, the interpolated passage states that upon the death of Christ in Jerusalem – that is before his cross at Golgotha, right above the entrance to hell – Satan wanted to tear away the soul of Christ (*slita ondina*), which, as Augustine asserts, would never die (*nec anima mortua est*). The Old Enemy craved to swallow it (*gløpa/devorare*), but being unable to recognize the true nature of Christ – that is, his hidden divinity (*godomens/verbum*) – he was instead captured (*veiddr/captus*) on the cross (*crossmarkit/crux christi*) like a fish (*fiscr/piscis*) on a fishhook (*øngull-inn/hamo*), like a mouse in a mousetrap (*treketti/muscipula*), or even caught in a snare (*gilldro/laqueo*) like an arctic fox (*melracki*) – a necessary adaptation of an African lion (*leo*) into a suitable Nordic equivalent – the prey most commonly caught in traps in medieval Iceland (see Durrenberger and Gísli Pálsson 1989, 39).

Augustine's *Sermo* 265D seems to have enjoyed limited circulation in Europe and is today extant in only two twelfth-century codices: Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. lat. 4951 (s. xii<sup>in</sup>, Rochester), and Worcester, Cathedral Library, F 93 (s. xii<sup>in</sup>, Worcester). Although Vat. lat. 4951 was copied in England, the collection it contains shows greater similarity with Roman than Carolingian homiliaries, it resembles English collections even less, as it gives much space to the texts of Augustine, pseudo-Augustine, and Caesarius of Arles (c. 470-542 AD), while none of the 221 sermons is from either Bede (c. 673-735) or Gregory the Great (c. 540-604), only 57 of them are connected to Paul the Deacon's (c. 720-96) reconstructed homiliary, while in the Roman homiliaries, 78 are from Alan of Farfa (d. 769) and 15 from Agimundus (c. 700-50) (see Richards 1988, 112-20). Furthermore, the excellent state of the texts might be proof that it is a copy of a Continental collection of sermons only recently acquired by the Rochester Cathedral Library. Like the two great twelfth-century Rochester Bibles, sharing both textual and paleographic features with the northern French Bibles revised at Saint-Germain-des-Prés, the Rochester homiliary may have been brought to Rochester from Paris (or a nearby region) via

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The Devil was greedy for Death, the Devil coveted Death. The cross of Christ was a mousetrap: the Death of Christ, or rather the mortal flesh of Christ, was like a bait in the mousetrap. He came, he swallowed it, and was caught. And behold, Christ rose up again. Where is Death now? Already for His flesh can be said what will be said for ours in the end: Death is swallowed up in victory [1 Cor. 15:54]. It was flesh, but it was not corruptible. Its nature remains the same, its quality changes. The substance is the same, but there is no deficiency there, no tardiness, no corruption, no neediness, nothing mortal, nothing which we know to be earthly. He was touched, He was patted, but he was not slain." The text of the sermon has been reprinted in PLS 2, cols. 704-08.

Canterbury, which maintained strong ties with northern France throughout the twelfth century (see Floyer and Hamilton 1906, 61-84).

After a long absence from theological sources, the metaphor of the mousetrap for the cross of Christ surfaces again in the theological and exegetical writings of Peter Lombard, bishop of Paris and one of the greatest exponents of the Paris school of theology. Perhaps prompted by renewed interest in the theological writings of Augustine, the metaphor is used in his *Sententiae in quattuor libris distinctae*, a comprehensive collection of theological texts extracted from the Bible and from the relevant patristic commentaries composed by Lombard at Saint-Victor Abbey between 1157 and 1158.<sup>20</sup> The excerpts were systematically collected in the form of a continuous gloss divided into four main books, partitioned according to the main theological themes summarized in the articles of the Creed: the Trinity, the Creation, the Incarnation, and the Sacraments. The *Sententiae* enjoyed extensive circulation and, towards the end of the twelfth century, the completion of individual scholarly commentaries on it became a fundamental requirement for the successful completion of a bachelor's degree in theology, the so-called *baccalarii Sententiarum*, which normally lasted two years and later led to the full degree known as *baccalarius formatus* (Wawrykow 1999, 650; Grant 1996, 48). In book 3, distinction 19, chapter 1, which draws extensively on Augustine's *Sermo 130* (a) – in which Christ is described as the Good Merchant who ransomed humanity from the Devil – Lombard illustrates how the cross functioned as a mousetrap, and Christ's blood as a bait for the devil.<sup>21</sup>

Per illum ergo redempti sumus, in quo princeps mundi nihil inuenit. Unde augustinus, causam et modum nostrae redemptionis insinuans, ait: Nihil inuenit diabolus in christo ut moretur, sed pro uoluntate patris mori christus uoluit; non habens mortis causam de peccato, sed de obedientia et iustitia mortem gustauit; per quam nos redemit a seruitute diaboli. Incideramus enim in principem huius saeculi, qui seduxit adam et seruum fecit, coepit que nos quasi uernaculos possidere. Sed uenit redemptor, et uictus est deceptor. Et quid fecit redemptor captiuatorum nostro? Tetendit ei muscipulam, crucem suam; posuit ibi quasi escam, sanguinem suum. Ille autem sanguinem fudit non debitoris, per quod recessit a debitoribus. Ille quippe ad hoc

20 Peter Lombard, *Sententiae*, par. 5/1-15. See also PL 192, cols. 795-96. The most extensive study on Peter Lombard is Colish 1994. A translation of all four books of the *Sententiae* is available in Peter Lombard, *The Sentences* (2007-10). The familiarity of the compiler of *Nidrstigningar saga* with this passage of Lombard's *Sententiae* and the mousetrap metaphor was postulated by Otto Gschwantler, who suggested that the translation must therefore have been compiled in the second half of the twelfth century (cf. Gschwantler 1968, 155).

21 Augustine's *Sermo 130* (a) is available in *Sermones ad populum*, cols. 725-28.

sanguinem suum fudit, ut peccata nostra deleret. Unde ergo diabolus nos tenebat, deletum est sanguine redemptoris: Non enim tenebat nos nisi uinculis peccatorum nostrorum. Istaerant catenae captiuorum. Venit ille, alligauit fortem uinculis passionis suae; intrauit in domum eius, id est in corda eorum ubi ipse habitabat, et uasa eius, scilicet nos, eripuit; quae ille impleuerat amaritudine sua. Deus autem noster, uasa eius eripiens et sua faciens, fudit amaritudinem et impleuit dulcedine, per mortem suam a peccatis redimens et adoptionem gloriae filiorum largiens (Peter Lombard, *Sententiae*, par. 5, 1-5).<sup>22</sup>

Lombard again quotes Augustine's *Sermo* 130 (a) in one of his sermons on the Nativity of the Lord<sup>23</sup> and in his *Collectaneorum in Paulum continuatio*, citing Heb. 2:14: "through Death, He might destroy him who had the Empire of Death, that is to say, the Devil".<sup>24</sup> It is from this last commentary that the mousetrap simile even entered the *Glossa ordinaria* (the standard glossed Bible), which was initiated in Laon in the early twelfth century and completed in Paris and Auxerre.<sup>25</sup> Lombard was one of the Parisian exegetes who edited the *Glossa* in the middle of the twelfth century.

As the Apocalypse-based physical descriptions of Satan (resembling his description in Revelation) has shown, the Icelandic compiler turned to the

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22 "Then through Him we have been redeemed, as in Him the Prince of the World [Satan] has found nothing. Hence, Augustine, alluding to the reason and manner of our Redemption, said: *The Devil found nothing in Christ for which He should die. Christ wished to die because that was His Father's will. Having no reason of death on account of sin, He tasted death through obedience and justice; through it He redeemed us from the servitude of the devil. Indeed, we had fallen upon that Prince of the World, who seduced Adam and made him his servant and he began to possess us almost like slaves. But the Redeemer came and the Seducer was overcome. And what did the Redeemer do to our Capturer? He set a mousetrap for him with His cross. He set there His blood almost like a bait. He has shed there His blood not because He was the debtor, therefore He receded from the debtors. He shed His blood to extinguish our sins. Therefore, what held us detained by the Devil was destroyed by the Redeemer; he detained us only through the bonds of our sins, which were the chains of the captives. He came and bound the strong one with the bonds of His Passion. He came into His house, that is, into the hearts of those where He was living, and rescued His vases, that is, us, which he had filled with his bitterness. But Our God, rescuing his vases and making them His own, poured out the bitterness and filled them with sweetness, redeeming the sins through His death and bestowing the adoption of the glory of the sons.*" Augustine's original text has been italicised.

23 The sermon has previously been wrongly attributed to Hildebert of Lavardin, archbishop of Tours (1056-1133); see Hildebert of Lavardin, *Sermones de tempore*, cols. 385A-385B. On Peter Lombard's sermons being mistakenly attributed to Hildebert, see Rosemann 2004, 353.

24 Peter Lombard, *Collectaneorum in Paulum continuatio*, 421B-421D. Heb. 2:14: *quia ergo pueri communicauerunt sanguini et carni et ipse similiter participauit hisdem ut per mortem destrueret eum qui habeat mortis imperium id est diabolium* ("Therefore, because the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself in like manner hath been partaker of the same: that, through Death, He might destroy him who had the Empire of Death, that is to say, the Devil").

25 The mousetrap simile occurs in the version of the *Glossa ordinaria* by Nicholas of Lyra (1270-1349). See Nicholas of Lyra, *Textus Biblie cum glossa ordinaria*, fol. 138<sup>r</sup>.

Scriptures when he felt the original descriptions in the Latin *Evangelium Nicodemi* were insufficient. He must have found the cursory description of Christ's final victory over Satan, which can certainly be viewed as the focal point of the *Evangelium Nicodemi*, also equally unsatisfying. For a remedy, he may have turned to a copy of the *Sententiae* in search for pertinent passages (such as, for instance, 1 Cor. 15:54, Col. 1:13-14, Heb. 2:14-15) alluding to Christ's victory over the Devil through the cross. Given the high variance of the interlinear and marginal glosses of the *Sententiae* – each copy represented a unique attempt to assist the student with issues of language, syntax, and rhetorical techniques of the Scriptures – it is highly likely that, much as in the case of Augustine's *Sermo* 130 (a) explaining Heb. 2:14, the very copy consulted by the Icelandic compiler included a marginal gloss invoking Augustine's *Sermo* 265D with its fishhook/mousetrap/snare metaphors for the cross.

### 3. PARISIAN PROVENANCE

An almost immediate circulation of writings produced by the Paris school of theology in early-thirteenth-century Iceland is confirmed by the survival of two texts, produced at Saint-Victor Abbey around 1200, among the remnants of 144 Latin manuscripts of devotional literature at the Arnamagnæan Institute in Copenhagen and catalogued by Merete Geert Andersen (see Andersen 2008).

It is remarkable that already around the year 1200 Iceland owned one of the few copies of the *Eulogium ad Alexandrum papam tertium* composed by John of Cornwall in Paris between 1177 and 1178 (Andersen 2008, item 103).<sup>26</sup> This work greatly influenced the debate concerning the hypostatic union, which took place during the Third Lateran Council, convened by Pope Alexander III in March 1179. In his treatise, John of Cornwall criticizes Peter Lombard's Christological views, accusing him above all of nihilism in asserting that Christ had assumed a human nature only accidentally.<sup>27</sup> This view clashed with the classical Boethian view, which traditionally contemplated the nature of Christ as a single unit of humanity and divinity, inseparable from each other (Bradshaw 2009, 123-24). This antinihilistic position that spread rapidly throughout Europe after the Third Lateran Council (and all the more radically in the early thirteenth century) might well underlie the theological conception and interpretation of *Niðrstigningar saga*.

The second piece of evidence of the circulation of the scholastic exegetical texts in thirteenth-century Iceland is the impressive Parisian Bible dating

<sup>26</sup> Five other manuscripts of the *Eulogium* are known today. See Curley 2006, 1038.

<sup>27</sup> Its text has been edited in Häring 1951. On the criticism advanced against Peter Lombard's *Sententiae*, see, most recently, Monagle 2007.

from the thirteenth century and consisting of seventy leaves scattered in the bindings of several manuscripts (Andersen 2008, item 122). The text of this *Glossa ordinaria* covers the entire Old and New Testaments and transmits Peter Lombard's prologue to 1 Corinthians (incipit *Corinthii sunt Achaei*) and Gilbert of Poitiers's (1070-1154) prologue to Revelation (incipit *Omnes qui pie*).<sup>28</sup> Both scholars had worked at the Abbey of Saint-Victor to finalize the text of the *Glossa ordinaria* in the middle of the twelfth century.<sup>29</sup> It is plausible that this volume, or a similar manuscript, was the biblical source consulted by the Icelandic compiler for the insertion of the interpolations derived from Revelation, since it still transmits sections of it and might have included the entire text.<sup>30</sup>

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The nature of the editorial interventions in *Niðrstigningar saga* indicates that the translation and revision of the *Evangelium Nicodemi* was undertaken by an Icelandic cleric well acquainted with the contemporary biblical glosses and commentaries produced by the exegetes of the Paris school of theology during the second half of the twelfth century. Such interventions were especially made to substantiate the original text of the apocryphon with information on Satan's intrinsic nature and on his role in Salvation history. If the seven-headed dragon of the Apocalypse is first invoked in *Niðrstigningar saga* to emphasize the monstrosity and potential destructiveness of Satan, Augustine's lurid metaphors for the cross and, by implication, the description of Satan as an infesting and greedy animal, available at that time through Peter Lombard's *Sententiae*, place great emphasis on Satan's immense pride and especially on his inability to recognize Christ's bipartite and inseparable natures: the human and the divine. Such inadequacy is implicitly extended to all individuals who dared to doubt or called into question the perfect hypostasis of Christ, which had been recently reestablished during the Third Lateran Council in 1179.

Thus, in a balance created by inversion, the Deceiver *par excellence* is now deceived and conquered. Like a greedy beast that infests waters, houses, or farms, Satan is incapable of understanding the sophistication and the intrinsic mechanism of the divine traps. Due to his low and vile attributes of predatoriness and viciousness, Satan is able to see and recognize only the detectable flesh of Christ, whereas he is entirely blind to the Divine *Logos*, on which he remains hanging transfixed. It is this grave miscalculation that would eventually cause his self-destruction and final defeat, in

28 Gilbert of Poitiers's authorship of the prologue is rejected in Lobrighon 1984, 113.

29 For an overview of the great exegetical work around the *Glossa ordinaria*, see van Liere 2011, 167-70.

30 Rev. 1:4:2 and 10:10-16:16 (fols. 69'-70).

a disastrous fall from a terrifying gulping dragon to a harmless mouse that concurrently fascinated and educated Icelanders throughout the Middle Ages and beyond.

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